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SUBJECT: PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS: LAGHMAN ELECTION PREPARATIONS ON
TRACK

¶1. (SBU) Summary: According to both the Laghman governor and the chief of Laghman's Independent Election Commission (IEC), the province is well prepared for the distribution of election-related materials, a fact confirmed by a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) inspection of the IEC's facilities. At a large meeting on August 1, area mullahs adopted a declaration supporting the elections. Concerns remain over staffing and security for polling places for female voters and over the status of the province's Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). At a PRT-supported shura (tribal gathering/meeting) in Alingar District, the governor was told that residents intended to fully participate in the elections. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a meeting on August 2, Laghman governor Lutfullah Mashal told the PRT that the August 20 elections will be his top priority. He expressed satisfaction with the preparations for the elections, claiming that the province had 200,000 registered voters, half of whom were women.

¶3. (SBU) He told the PRT that there was a meeting of 800 mullahs in Mehtarlam on August 1 to rally support for the elections. According to the governor, the mullahs adopted a declaration stating in part that (1) they supported the elections, and did not want non-Laghmani Taliban to create a rift among the locals (according to the Governor, "Laghmani Taliban are an ethnic and not a political movement"; he did not clarify that distinction); (2) Muslims had a duty to vote, in order to create an Islamic government; (3) the mullahs will vote as well. The governor told the PRT that he will ask the mullahs to issue a statement to the general public expressing their support for the election, and asked for assistance in getting the statement printed. (Note: In a subsequent meeting with Afghan National Police (ANP) Provincial Commander General Omaryar, the PRT was told that the meeting consisted of 500 mullahs. Information from other local sources indicated that the declaration included a call for a timetable for the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) Mashal requested USG assistance in providing fuel to district governors so that they could travel more extensively in support of the elections, and for the province's radio/television bureau, in order that it could broadcast 24 hours a day in advance of the election. The transmitter in Alishang District had been forced to shut down due to a lack of fuel, the governor claimed. The governor added that some candidates and campaign workers were being "intimidated" in Alishang District.

¶5. (SBU) The PRT also met with Laghman Provincial IEC Chief Dr. Daoud the same day. Daoud told the PRT that all "sensitive" materials required for the election (including ballots, ink, and other controlled materials) had been received, and showed the PRT samples of those materials held in locked conex containers under guard on the IEC compound. He also showed the PRT a detailed plan for the distribution of those materials to the province's polling places in advance of election day. Addressing the subject of communications, Daoud said that district coordinators had been given

cellphones with SIM cards, and that an additional ten satellite phones had also been distributed.

¶16. (SBU) Daoud said that the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) for Laghman Province had been "late in setting up." He said the ECC in Laghman consisted of three local residents, and added "they say they're busy, but they're not." Daoud admitted to concern over staffing of polling stations for female voters. Polling place workers need a certain level of education in order to perform their functions, and finding literate women (especially in rural districts) is very difficult, according to Daoud.

¶17. (SBU) At a PRT-supported shura held at Watangatu in Alishang District on August 4, locals told the governor they intended to participate in the elections despite threats of violence. Tribal elders urged residents to fully research and discuss the merits of presidential and provincial council candidates.

¶18. (SBU) Comment. Both Governor Mashal and IEC Chief Daoud appeared confident in their assertions that preparations for the election were well in hand, and the PRT's brief examination of the IEC facilities, plans, and election materials seemed to confirm those assertions. However, concerns remain over security of the province's polling stations, especially those located in remoter, more troubled districts such as Dalat Shah. The matter of administration and security of polling stations for female voters is of special concern. The PRT will continue to monitor and report on election preparations. End Comment.

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